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ABSTRACT

The federal policy decision to emphasize career education presented the issues of the labor market to the postsecondary community in vivid form. The ideas and practices developed under the banner of K-12 have had only limited utility in colleges and universities. There is an active process of experimentation and invention underway, but on terms that can be more easily reconciled with postsecondary traditions. The current state is one of communication, reporting, and limited analysis. An extensive bibliography is included. (Author/LBH)

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CAREER EDUCATION AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDY

William Toombs

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What promised to be a gradual adjustment in higher education to a change in demand for college graduates quickly became a job crisis by the early 1970's (Barton 1975, p. 280). This condition was precipitated by a change in composition of the labor force. Freeman attributes this change to a marked slowdown in the growth of professional and managerial jobs that coincided with an increase in the number of college graduates between 1969 and 1974 (quoted in Trivett 1975). Degree holders began to face the same dim prospects that have confronted noncollege youth since 1957. In many of those years, the unemployment rates among the young have been three times the rate of the entire labor force. They exceeded the 12 percent level throughout the 1960's and peaked at 16.9 percent for the 16-to-19-year-olds in 1971 (Manpower 1974; USDL 1971). The inability to create an effective transition from school to work, at any level, has become a particularly stubborn societal problem (Princeton 1968; National Commission 1976).

Conditions in the labor market generated two reactions in the postsecondary community. The first response produced extensive description, analysis, and interpretation of the relationship between higher education and work. A trend toward predictability that reached back half a century or more was replaced by turnabout and fluctuation, thus making the task of accurate enrollment monitoring and job need forecasting formidable. (See Trivett (1975) for a description of the principal features of the postsecondary response to changing labor market conditions.)

A second response of colleges and universities involved translating into programs the most potent and persistent consequences of the changed educational environment. If traditionalists had their way, alterations in the curriculum and course offerings along with an appropriate rationale for changes would occur, but only after much debate and much consideration (Dressel, deLisle 1969; Carnegie 1976). This normal process was accelerated by the forceful federal introduction of "career education" in 1971. Because of a unique conjunction of persons, policies, and circumstances, the idea now offers a convenient opportunity for reviewing the first response of the postsecondary community to the events of the 1970's. By now there is enough published discussion to show how career education is interpreted in higher education, the nature of general and specific reactions, and the essential conditions to which institutions must respond.

Career Education

Semantics—The phrase "career education" was given broad public introduction by Sidney P. Marland Jr. very early in his tenure as Commissioner of Education. The idea in its current form is best examined as a policy principle rather than as an educational philosophy, as an ideology rather than a theory (Marland 1971). The policy was one of "genuine reform," "purposeful reform," the kind of reform

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that carries overtones of the Puritan work ethic and enlightened Populism. It placed "work" at the center of education by offering "a very fluid idea of design for introducing awareness of work and motivation intrinsic to the work idea from early childhood education through the self-evident work-focused functions of graduate and professional schools" (Marland 1974, p. 7). Support for the policy began by an initial allotment of $9 million from the Office of Education, which grew to $61 million in 1974, joined in the interim by almost 20 percent of the N.I.E. budget. The weight of Vocational Education Act funds and expenditures by 19 state programs can be added to complete the total annual support figure (Grubb, Lazerson 1975) (LaDuca, Barnett 1974, p. 6). In detailing the fiscal history of career education, Herr cites the estimate prepared by Worthington that shows $100 million invested by states and federal agencies between 1965 and 1973 (Herr 1975, p. 43).

The power of the proposal to command immediate attention came from the single fact that "career education" carried no explicit meaning, many implicit meanings, and no official definition. By "declining to lay out a concrete definition" Marland created what anthropologist James Spradley called "a highly symbolic concept" bound to elicit some form of reaction from friend or foe (NWREL 1973, p. 8). State education departments moved briskly to formulate operating definitions (Herr 1975). *Education Index*, which showed no separate entry under the phrase before 1972, listed 58, then 117 entries in two succeeding years before further subclassification became necessary. Did the debate produce a definition? Super's (1976) detailed analysis of key constructs associated with career education as they appeared in writings on the subject before 1975 shows a low level of consensus. One must conclude that the label has functioned as a means to capture ideas already held by some of the most active minds in education (NWREL 1973).

A move to formal definition was finally made by Hoyt in 1975 describing career education as "the totality of experiences through which one learns about and prepares to engage in work as part of his or her way of living." This does show the effects of debate, in that the emphasis is clearly on the individual. An early definition focused on the broader interrelationship aspect. The purpose of career education includes "the total effort of public education and the community aimed at helping all individuals to become familiar with the values of a work-oriented society, to integrate these values into their personal value systems and to implement these values into their lives in such a way that work becomes possible, meaningful, and satisfying to each individual" (Hoyt 1972, p. 1).

What of the competing views about the nature of the collegiate experience: the liberal tradition, developmental education, general education, pre-professional study? Career education drew upon all philosophical camps and many forerunners for fragmentary contributions (Rogers 1973, p. 473). Herr (1972) (1975) has established the evolutionary character of these adaptations. Liberal learning emphasizes education for a full and fulfilling life. Since life today revolves around work, and because liberal education itself was once "vocational," career education should "facilitate living" by giving "the skills to live" (NWREL 1973, p. 55) (Olson 1975). From general education came the idea of cultural relevance, with the added notation that the citizen's role, the family role, and the human role all lead back to and through work activity. Theories of developmental education, richest contributor to the design of college programs, provided the view that vocational choice is the ultimate product of a continuing process of decision, reformulation, and refinement (Super 1957; Kohlberg, Mayer 1972; Rebelsky, Speisman 1975). From developmental views also emerge the most penetrating questions about career education; the work of Perry (1968) reveals the scope and process of post-adolescent growth to be far more complex than the notion of career development. As McMurrin observed, "career education is properly synonymous in meaning with education" (NWREL 1973, p. 19).

Salience—Power in the form of political salience came to career education because both the criticisms it presented and the promises it held out touched points where the interests of taxpayers, parents, representatives of minorities, businessmen, government officials, and educational administrators came together. Criticism was expressed in strong terms (Marland 1974, p. 7). Public impatience with the results of education was seen as justified because the expectation that education would enhance employability was not realized. Youth unemployment was high while jobs requiring even modest skills went unfilled. Also, students lacked the rudiments of proper work behavior because societal conditions kept them isolated and the schools did nothing to remedy the situation. Schooling was viewed as fundamentally flawed in other ways too, as the high dropout rates at all levels seemed to demonstrate. Among college students the absence of purpose among those who had given "no serious thought to the consequences" of their study was taken as a sign of educational weakness (Cosand 1972, p. 60). The "most severe failings can be found in general education" and these are "the primary reason for the schools' failure" (Marland, March 1972, p. 34). These criticisms are given full explication in Hoyt (1974, p. 2) under the title "Conditions Calling for Educational Reform" and their substance analyzed separately by Herr and Cramer (1975). Obviously, employers want prepared workers, parents want employed offspring, laymen seek educational purposes they can understand, and everyone wants relief from dissent. Consequently, this critique did elicit funds for a reform program (LaDuca, Barnett 1974, p. 7).

Promise—The promises put forward in the name of career education were largely the traditional claims of vocational education lifted to a new scale (Grubb, Lazerson 1975). Meaningful work dignifies the individual by giving purpose to life, thereby generating moral benefits along with social cohesion. Increased technology demands more specialized training for more people. Explicit training in job search skills, decision-making, and right attitudes toward work improve job mobility. Credentialing by the degree structure is out of

line with distinctions based on competence and serves to continue invidious distinctions between academic and all other subjects. In socioeconomic terms, if education can be brought to closer correspondence with true manpower needs both high employment and many associated benefits will emerge.

The true boldness of the career education proposal lay in its scope. It was intended "to be a cultural innovation of some magnitude," which aimed to change "the structure of our educational system," particularly "the way our culture structures continuity and choice" (NWREL 1973, p. 7). From the initial premise of the "reformation of our entire secondary education system to position it properly for maximum contribution of our individual and national life" (Maryland), within a year the idea grew to "encompass the entire school program from kindergarten through secondary school completion. In addition, it included the postsecondary level and adult and continuing education" (Marland, March 1972, p. 35). All subject matter along with supporting services and even out-of-school experience was to be bent to the same last. While the proposals for kindergarten through 12 were detailed and often prescriptive, the role of colleges and universities was one of upgrading and extending processes already begun in the schools.

Collegiate Applications

General Reactions—Given the diversity of institutional types, the absence of strong systems, and the preference of professional and paraprofessional parallels to career education programs, it is not surprising to find few large scale adoptions of career education in colleges and universities. Neither has there been extensive construction of model programs, a favored activity of the kindergarten-through-12 sector.

Some fragments of career education have appeared on many campuses. Junior and community colleges easily embrace many of the components, since career education is a concept to which they are already committed (Batsale 1974, p. 2). The difficulties they report are likely to be the sticky areas for all of higher education. Special attention is needed on *how* activities are carried out. Sources of operational problems are realistic associations with business, counseling that works, and placement with follow-up (DeBernardis 1973, p. 10). The narrowness of job preparation, even when "job clusters" are the unit, runs counter to the flexibility of the "career lattice" concept developed in the two-year colleges (Ryan 1974, p. 40; NWREL 1973, p. 120). Predictably, the greatest difficulty is persuading faculty in the well-structured disciplines to adapt their teaching to the career view. McCuistion and Walker (1976) presented mathematics and science teachers with career-laden statements for reaction. Their conclusion was that "junior college science and mathematics faculty are generally ignorant of and non-supportive of career education concepts." Language study can make an accommodation but it requires acceptance of an auxiliary role as a career-related skill (Steiner 1974; Honig, Brod 1974).

Four year colleges identified with the liberal arts have moved gradually to examine career education as something more than another assault by neovocationalism. Although few would accept the rosy interpretation of history that equates career education with liberal education in its earliest tradition (Olson 1975), most would fit it into the liberal tradition (Adams 1975; McGrath 1974). For example, the Lilly Foundation programs, now in their third year at 28 institutions, have emphasized the integrating power the liberal tradition can bring to work experience. Critical comment has moved on from instinctive defense of the liberal arts to more incisive observations. Hitchcock (1973) attributes the acceptance of public policies that emphasize neovocationalism to mistaken notions of "relevance" and to a professoriate that has lost confidence in its own efforts. Nash and Agne (1973) warn against the "encapsulating" consequences of narrow training, the tendency toward a simplistic psychology of learning that overlooks "evocative and heuristic" modes, and the expectation that inequity will be avoided by performance-based criteria. It is the opinion of McGrath (1974) that the central task of colleges is to build a constructive balance of career preparation, value judgments, and general education. While the interdisciplinary curriculum appears to be a promising medium, "adequate consideration will require academic readjustments of seismic proportions." The accommodation of the career idea within the traditions of both liberal and general education is well begun (Hood et al. 1975).

Specific Activities—Five years of clarification have made it possible to stipulate the main features a comprehensive career education program might be expected to show at the collegiate level. They are stated as general principles under the headings below and are followed by an assessment and illustrations of their application. It is clear that much more experimental activity is taking place, but reports are just beginning to appear in print.

Here are the main attributes of the Career Education Approach at the Postsecondary Level:

- A career emphasis is incorporated into the academic mainstream by: (1) making explicit those aspects of each course that have career implications, (2) cultivating skills in every course to a level of marketable competence, and (3) reorienting faculty toward instructional strategies that will emphasize career applicability without compromising quality.

This provision is most problematical, because it asks for an alteration in the relationships among the disciplines and depends upon faculty action. Alma College has created a career course parallel to the academic core that extends over four years. A specialized faculty role as "career preparation coordinator" has been introduced. DePauw University has taken an area with wide career applicability, organizational theory and administrative behavior, and built a coherent "area minor" under the title "Business and Public Services." It can be taken by any liberal arts major as a supplement. St. Louis University has a similar option that provides a certificate to supplement the A.B. degree. North

Central College in Illinois has moved toward a broad blending of career ideas into its liberal arts courses. Another example is the University of Alabama Career Development Program where every professor is asked to devote one class-hour to the career implications of his field.

• Counseling and advisement is made comprehensive enough to integrate the career development aspects of collegiate experience by: (1) insuring an extensive flow of accurate information about market conditions and career paths, (2) encouraging the development of realistic self-concept with respect to career options, and (3) cultivating operational skills for job search and career decision-making.

A structural adjustment that simply adds new personnel and more functions is the most common way of accommodating career interests. The question of where the functions should be located within the organization is critical. Hamline University (U.S. Office of Education 1974), Houston (SREB 1974), and University of Florida (SREB 1974) elected to construct new programs under the chief academic officer. This action is believed to give wider faculty acceptance and consequently more participation. The University of North Florida (SREB 1974) chose to reorganize the student services office around the career mission and supplement the existing staff to cover new responsibilities. A third option is the creation of a free standing center with an open mandate to serve a particular group, such as women, minorities, or individuals changing fields. Mills College has such a center (U.S. Office of Education 1974). Dickinson College career development center helps students to identify "liberal skills" as well as to develop job search strategies. The center at Pennsylvania State University has identified eight critical areas in career development and designed open-access information programs for individual students around each area. Project NCCE (National Cooperative for Career Education) is developing a prototype library of educational materials on a nationwide basis from which local adaptations can be constructed. Ten universities are cooperating under OE sponsorship (Center for Vocational . . . 1975).

• Specialized support activities to improve interaction between the worlds of work and learning by: (1) developing experience at the workplace through cooperative plans, volunteer service, part-time employment, internships, and field observation; and (2) extending the process of placement beyond graduation to the point of employment and alumni follow up.

This is the most costly element in the career education package. Many of the functions are new and highly specialized—for example, co-op coordinators—and all of them require administrative support on a significant scale. Cooperative education has been tested and expanded into many forms over the last three years. At one end of the experimental spectrum are the traditional introductions to the work role characterized by Northeastern, Drexel, and Georgia Tech. At the other end are programs in development at Augustana, Rose-Holman, Albion, and Alma, in which a fragmentary work experience is examined in terms of its career implications. Another aspect of this idea involves follow-up, since many graduates can anticipate a long period of post-baccalaureate search. Alumni counseling, job clubs (Azrin 1975), and mid-career follow ups are all in prospect. Placement offices have made the transition to "career development centers" rather easily but the extension into post-graduation activities raises many questions.

• The integrative and sequential nature of the career development process must be recognized throughout the institution. Few institutions have been able to even attempt the kind of career development network needed to realize this idea. The University of Alabama has made comprehensive coverage the hallmark of its program by establishing committees on career education in every college and opening participation to every faculty member.

The Changed Setting

If career education has changed in meaning and expression, so have the conditions that seemed to justify it so strongly five years ago. *First*, some of the mythology has been swept away. The suggestion that education with a vocational emphasis somehow generates more jobs again has proven to be false (Grubb, Lazerson 1975). Employment levels are the product of economic conditions and public policy. Education through its programs and the individuals it teaches can only respond. This may be a creative and anticipatory response but it is still a reaction. Suggestions that direct training can erase an apprehension about work and instill the values and attitudes of conformist employees have evaporated as studies of the worksite turn up factors that are beyond the scope of education.

Still another notion invites correction. The idea that students need to be enticed into career-related programs is not supported by data. Vocational-technical programs in 1969 already enrolled 8 million students in 1,296 institutions, compared to 4 million students in 405 institutions in 1964 (Rogers 1973, p. 478). College students have been shifting toward professional and preprofessional programs in larger numbers for a dozen years (Stephenson 1974, p. 394).

Second, a few harsh realities have emerged. The problems of employment for educated persons are concentrated largely at the point of entry into the labor force. There has been little evidence that education is not responsible to the needs of business, industry, and the professions once a person has entered the work force. The entry problem will undoubtedly intensify because of the number of young people in the population, the share of that number with advanced education, and the improved eligibility of women, minorities, and handicapped persons, who are entitled to an equal position in the work force. Colleges are expected not only to aid the entry process but also to help adjust student expectations to the dimensions of current reality (Barton 1975, p. 280).

Even though the personal significance of advanced education may shift from a return on investment in monetary form to more elusive benefits of life-style and prestige, the actual

lifetime effects of extensive education are not well understood. Recent studies of the "quality of life" in its broadest aspects have demonstrated that the influences of education are largely indirect and interdependent with other factors (Campbell 1976).

To meet these conditions, institutions of higher education, even in their diversity, will have to look to their own solutions rather than to the prescriptive models of career education. Some needs stand out. The collegiate curriculum needs a thorough examination, not so much for change as for the clarification to students and faculty of the purposes, meanings, and consequences of the options it presents. More effective ways of prompting, cuing, and informing individual decisions about life as well as jobs need to be devised. Support for the individual during the transition from school to work adds a completely new dimension to institutional responsibility that needs to be met with honesty and ingenuity. It is important not only to students but also to the larger society that the independent worth of scholarly thought and scientific knowledge as it is represented in the disciplines be reasserted. Even in an age of high technocracy, academic knowledge has its own integrity, its own validity.

In summary, the federal policy decision to emphasize career education presented the issues of the labor market to the postsecondary community in vivid form. The ideas and practices developed under the banner of K-12 have had only limited utility in colleges and universities. There is, however, an active process of experimentation and invention underway, but on terms that can be more easily reconciled with postsecondary traditions. The current stage is one of communication, reporting, and limited analysis.

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